



ONE MAN'S INDIA

*By T. Earle Welby*

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AWAY, DULL COOKERY !

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THE VICTORIAN ROMANTICS

*Edited by T. Earle Welby*

THE SILVER TREASURY OF ENGLISH LYRICS

THE WORKS OF W. S. LANDON (VOLS. I-XII)

# ONE MAN'S INDIA

BY  
T EARLE WELBY

with  
an Introduction by  
GERALD BARRY

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*And five Tailpieces*





## INTRODUCTION

OF Welby's qualities as critic a good deal has been written since his death at the beginning of this year; though not enough, even now, to do full justice to them. During his lifetime they never quite attained the recognition they deserved. The publication of this book is a reminder of what is, at least in part, the reason: Welby lived the greater part of his adult life as a journalist in India, that portion of British territory which the Briton at home knows and cares about least. Until circumstances tempted him to cut adrift from the East and settle in London in 1920 – circumstances which turned out to be of momentary ill-fortune for him, though of what good fortune to

contemporary English letters the years that followed were to prove — his name as a writer was entirely unknown in this country. In the decade and a bit that followed, he built up for himself among the more discerning the reputation of being almost the best literary critic alive.

It is not my intention to add here anything to what has been written of him in this regard. But these pages about India that follow have a bearing on his critical gifts; for he brought to his criticism, besides the learning that gave it authority, qualities of mind and judgment that had been acquired in another place, and in particular a certain half-amused detachment or tolerance which derived from his acquaintance with more than one culture and more than one set of human and intellectual values. Something of this is tacitly conveyed in *One Man's India*. The reader of it acquires an understanding of Welby, both as man and writer, that could not be had by reading only his critical work. Here he

is revealed as the intensely human person he was, the most astonishing blend – not contradiction – of gravity and gaiety it has been my fortune to encounter. No man could have a keener sense of the fitness of things and, at the same time, of their essential absurdity. It was this in him especially that made him so attractive a companion.

If one is to compare this all-too-short book (it would have been longer had he lived) with the conventional volume of Indian reminiscences which in most ways it is so unlike, one must record at once that it contains within its slender confines as many good stories as the average work of this kind would contain in the course of two large and deliberate volumes. This is due partly, of course, to sheer literary ability in the telling of a tale, but it is also due to a peculiarly acute sense of comic values in the man himself. For while Welby was a real Conservative, in politics and by temperament, he was very far from being one of the conventional

kind that have made the Empire what it is, and are Conservative because it has never occurred to them that one can decently be anything else. He had arrived at his Conservatism by his own very individual processes of reasoning and observation; and he contrived to combine with it, rarely enough, that liberal habit of mind which can sit back and laugh at itself, and with the other fellow.

Welby had plenty of humour, and wit too; but more than either he was possessed of an entirely boyish sense of fun. Sometimes it could be catastrophic. One of my most cherished recollections of him concerns a certain dripping day in November 1926, when he decided to mitigate the austerities (as he would have put it) of a press-day in the dejected purlieus of Hammersmith, where the old *Saturday Review* was then printed, by letting off Catherine-wheels in the composing-room. In the midst of his fiery endeavours to raise our spirits the manager

entered, accompanied by a personage whose astonishment and vexation were subsequently explained to us by the disclosure that he was the man from the fire insurance company, come untimely to inspect the premises “ and man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward ”

But the reader will find here much else besides some deliciously told stories and a good deal of knowledgeable common sense on Indian problems. He will find things, as I began by saying, that interpret Welby as man and writer. In particular we are afforded an insight into that side of him which as a person but rarely, and then only to his intimates, he allowed to be disclosed, but which accounts for a good deal in his work. I mean the touch of mysticism in him. It was, perhaps, an unexpected quality in one who, nearer the surface, exhibited a healthy suspicion of mystics and especially of the trappings of their cult, but that it existed no one who knew him intimately can doubt. Another quality, which went down very

deep in him and is brought vividly to light in these pages, was his love of the English country. No doubt this love had been intensified by nostalgia experienced during successive years of exile. As he tells us here, though born and brought up during his earliest years in India, he never doubted, on his first contact with English soil, where his true home was ; and when – almost at the end of his life, as fate decreed – he was enabled, by an event in his domestic affairs which left him entirely happy, to settle among the scenes and scents of pastoral England, he revelled in them, simply.

This side of him – which, again, aids the understanding of his work – was only fully revealed to me in the later years of our friendship. Until then he had characteristically kept it close because he was not in a position to indulge it. I remember his unfolding to me in the garden of his cottage near Dorking, on one of those June afternoons when summer

is almost oppressive in its rapt loveliness, his idea, set down in this book, that in England Nature is so friendly that it collaborates with man. What understanding that shows! It shows also, of course, that in his sensibility to the best things that are English he owed something to his contacts with a contrasting world. No one not possessed of an acquaintance with Nature in other moods could have perceived just this about her as manifested in the intimate fields of England. Very occasionally the pressure of these feelings found release in poetry. One verse in particular, "Hills and Trees," is so human and revealing that I take leave to reproduce it in full. I had the pleasure of printing it at the time in the *Week-end Review*.

*I cry for comfort to you, hills and trees,  
To you the steadfast, you that take each  
breeze  
To be resistant, else to sway and sway,  
For joy of swaying to the wind's chance way,*



*Or in ironic courtesy to bend  
Whither the breath of the world would have  
    one tend !  
But I, magnanimous and weak, have  
    planned  
Rebellious mountains on subservient sand,  
Put forth compliant boughs that yet will  
    break  
Whate'er the way the wind with them may  
    take.  
Then sway, O steadfast hills, to save my  
    pride,  
And you, O swaying boughs, be petrified !*

With which not wholly irrelevant quotation I must conclude what has turned out to be, I am afraid, not an introduction to *One Man's India* so much as a postscript to a highly prized friendship.

GERALD BARRY

I

Br



# I

MAYBE that Byron should be forgiven the insolence of making the sea his private looking-glass it is certain that a nobody could not be forgiven for treating a continent as merely the reflector of his own little personality, and no such insolence is in my intention I propose no more than the recording of some of the experiences through which as a child and as a man I apprehended whatever of India is mine Of experiences which happened to be mine in India, but which in essentials might have been mine anywhere, I have nothing to say, and in writing of those other, those relevant experiences, I have kept liberty to reject and to rearrange facts in the interest of expressiveness, that is, of the only kind of truth that concerns me, truth to idea and emotion.

I was born in India at B——, in the north, in 1881. Forty years later, when I was lunching a poet and critic of the 'nineties upstairs in the old Café Royal, he informed me, with a fine old-fashioned decadent relish of the exotic, that the peripatetic supplier of Turkish coffee was a Nubian. "Well," I said, "it is very little I know of Nubians, perhaps no more than there came to me in the last decadent poet's simile, 'as Turkis rip a Nubian's womb with damascened yataghans,' but I will wager you the coffee waiter is an Indian, and from the cast of his features was born pretty near where I was born." And presently I spoke to the man in Hindustani and, sure enough, he had been born at B——. All the curiosity my friend the poet and critic had felt about him was at once allayed. In not being Nubian the coffee waiter was nothing ; and I certainly did not become an interesting exotic on the revelation that I had been born where he had. Yet, if you come to think of it, for an Englishman to have been born in India

means at least this, that he can never wholly separate his discovery of the world from his discovery of India

To be sure, how much of India a child discovers will depend very largely on the attitude of his parents, and the most of those British couples who have children in India have to bring them up, till the early age of dispatch Home for education, in a compromise between two very imperfectly represented worlds. To my father, with his wise dislike of confusion, it seemed well that I should live mentally altogether in the East until I could truly live mentally in the West. And so until I was nearly six I was not allowed to speak a sentence of English even to my parents, so, too, when I learned to read, at perhaps three or four months after the age of four, it was not in English but in an Indian language, and, by my father's sagacious choice, in an archaic sacred epic, very dear to many of the Hindus of the province in which I was born and in which I spent my childhood. In time, say, six or

seven months, I had by heart, probably more from my pundit's recitation than from my slow reading, more and longer passages than years later I could ever acquire out of a compulsory Virgil.

I was in my prime as an Orientalist, I take it, shortly after attaining the age of five, and certainly fell into a serious decline in scholarship not long after my sixth birthday. It was not so much that by then I had permission to talk English at pleasure and had taught myself to read a little English out of anger at my incapacity over pages so much simpler to the eye than the large, character-crammed pages of the *Ramayana*. Spoken English I apparently supposed to be no more than useful ; and that printed English had in it anywhere anything romantical in spirit or almost hypnotic in recitation, anything to make a lesson an excitement followed by reverie, I did not suspect then, nor indeed for some years. Not the counter-attraction of English but a change of pundits ruined all.

When we were at R——, I had for an hour or so daily a pundit who could and readily would illustrate the *Ramayana* with a diagram of a Rakshas, of one of the demons who resisted the hero of the epic in the invasion of Ceylon to rescue Sita, varying that illustration with a nearly identical diagram of Hanuman, the Monkey God, who assisted the hero. At C——, to which we were transferred shortly after I was six, my new pundit had no inclination to diagrams of demons or of deities, and objected on principle to skipping a comparatively dull passage in order to attain to a climax.

I had one other pundit, later on, at N——, but with him I could establish no *modus vivendi*. The anniversary of my birthday occurring providentially when I had accumulated grievances against him, I artfully petitioned my endlessly indulgent parents for the gift of a sword, none of your wooden or other sham affairs, but a genuine if miniature *tulwar*. In that semi-barbaric area, surrounded as we were



by Native States and feudal landlords, the Indian nobility and gentry carried swords as a matter of course, and there was no difficulty in getting one of the noted local swordsmiths to make a miniature weapon of authentic sword steel. Provided with this, I awaited the arrival of the first pundit I had actively disliked ; and five minutes after his arrival, being as humourless as he was unresourceful, he was running at considerable speed round the garden. As he explained subsequently to my father, I was " too young a gentleman to be entrusted with a sword." That day we read no more. Nor indeed on any day that followed. My last memory as a student of the Hindu epic is bitter-sweet, for if I had had for a few moments the unusual pleasure of pursuing a pedagogue, I was thereafter chastised with some severity.

A hundred things kept me from reverting in later years to any serious study of the older literature of the Hindus, except in translation. I did indeed take up

modern Hindi, as I took up Urdu, for a while, after my return from England to India, and made better progress than the next man, being aided by childish knowledge which had been overlaid rather than totally forgotten ; but the absence in both languages of any literature attractive to me was very discouraging, and in a year or two I ended what had come to seem a waste of time, and was content with extremely colloquial fluency in Hindustani.







## II

BUT if I thus fell away in childhood from the study of old Hindu poetry, I did not lose contact with the Hindu mind, and indeed was drawn increasingly into Hinduism of a sort, the popular Hinduism of Northern India, a religion far removed from the Hinduism of the Sanskrit classics and even from the Hinduism of cultured Hindus of the upper castes. It is impossible for me now to judge how far I was, as we say, "serious," when I participated in the very simple rites with which two or three of the servants propitiated the deity at the end of the garden, or the other deity whose shrine was under the sacred fig-tree on the road leading to our house. It may be doubted whether a child ever is quite serious, in the adult sense of that

word, when it occupies itself in things of this kind. How far was Walter Pater merely playing when in childhood he organised ritual and affected a sort of infantile episcopal authority? I certainly liked presenting a garland of marigolds daily to the little idol at the end of the garden, and I found it a good auditor of the kind any lonely child would desire. I do not remember ever having had any awe of it, and indeed it was but a godling and, I understood from the servants, wholly amiable. I certainly never prayed to it for anything I wanted. On the other hand – but I do not know how far this may have been simply out of a wish to play a game exactly according to its rules – I treated it with elaborate respect. And then I had a cult of the sacred *Tulsi* plant, and remember going to the length of impressing on my parents that it should never be injured.

Lest any of this should suggest that my parents belonged to that deplorable class of Occidentals whose adulation of the

Orient is the greatest modern misfortune the Orient has experienced, I hasten to say that they were neither Theosophists before the event nor any other kind of raveners after the wisdom of the East. My father, the son of an Anglican bishop, was an agnostic with a profound feeling for the poetry and pathos of Christianity, and my mother, brought up in another Church, had come to occupy, with less irony, more or less the same position. In part they were not aware of my worship of strange gods, if worship it was, for the rest, with their unfailing imaginative sympathy they refused by prohibition or encouragement to force my immature mind into defining the situation.

After a while my quasi-religious enthusiasm waned, and soon the world was too much with me. The innocence of middle-age can hardly comprehend the iniquity of the child who so suddenly and eagerly threw himself into the ruffianism of quail-fighting, a sport which for the degenerate descendants of the Moguls was the usual



induction to the infamy of cock-fighting, with enormous sums at stake. The quails were charming creatures, and so readily tamed that within four or five days after being netted they would feed from one's hand and follow one about. The preparation of the cock-birds for fighting, however, took quite a long time, the bird under training being carried about by the trainer, myself, in the orthodox muslin bag with a circle of cane stitched into the bottom of the bag, so that it might have the maximum of repose in twilight in the intervals of being made to do a sort of Swedish drill, as one pressed it down with one hand on to the palm of the other to develop the muscles of its legs and to harden its claws.

From this bloodthirstiness I was weaned by the parental strategy which provided first more hens than cock-birds among the purchased quail, then by the introduction of putatively militant partridges who were much more amusing when scratching out white-ants' nests than when fighting.

Then I had the gift of a few pairs of the Himalayan partridge, which is a fire-eater in quite another sense, being a bird which will immediately rush at and peck to pieces any live coal or small smouldering brand thrown to it. Presently, it was birds of all sorts that occupied my attention — birds and a particularly attractive new pony. As for the birds, I was still in close touch with popular Hindu thought, so that when I cultivated a small skill with the pellet-bow, a much more accurate and lethal weapon than any catapult of the West, and requiring a special knack in the discharge lest the hand holding the bow be injured by the pellet, I always respected the birds sacred in Hinduism, notably the jay, *nilkanth*, “blue-throat,” as the god was blue-throated when he saved the world by swallowing all the poison of the sea. And as for ponies, who knew better than I the importance of lucky marks, and the validity of the charm whereby spavin and much else, numerous gods being willing, might be averted? And even as

to the gods, though now with the cool detachment to which one may attain as one's seventh birthday approaches, I learned something more as experience was widened by travel and changes in domestic staff, and alteration in the considerable circle of learned, simple, old-fashioned Hindu gentlemen who visited my father.

My two original godlings had seemed to me in my green, unknowing age an adequate pantheon, but now I began to understand that there were major gods, omnipresent, and subaltern gods speeding about in the service of each, and local gods with a very restricted authority. Much was still hidden from me : it was not till a quarter of a century later that, returned from the West and editing a daily newspaper in quite another part of India, I heard the Hindu pantheon was still rapidly in the making. Then and only then was there presented to me the apotheosis of a lately deceased and highly popular municipal authority under a title



AN ADEQUATE PANTHEON

which may be translated, "Mr. Deputy-Chairman God." Indeed, I remember how taken aback I was as a boy temporarily exiled from India when I found in an English vicarage a work of reference which displayed to me more Hindu gods than I, sometime a worshipper of two and afterwards a good deal exposed to deities, had ever heard named.

And to what, the patient reader may ask, do such trivial reminiscences lead? Perhaps only to this: that a mind which became aware of the world only as it became aware of India, and was in its small way, from almost the first, privy to part of Hindu India's secret, is not likely to be either quite sceptical on the one hand or to be duped, on mature experience of India, on the other. Even what has been said, how superficially and in no more than the recalling of a child's experiences, about the Hindu pantheon, will not be altogether unprofitable if it suggests to a reader here and there the double failure of the subtle and prolific Hindu mind -

its failure to define its religious position, and its failure in imagination when it approaches sublimity by a process of indiscriminate addition instead of by a creative act. In the art of a congeries of people to whom I am attached by the memories of childhood and by the sense of obligations in later life (and here I speak as, I believe, one of the first journalists in India to press for the revival of indigenous artistic aims and methods), there is too often a presumption that divine energy shall be conveyed, not as Blake might have conveyed it in the impassioned drawing of the creative hand, but by giving the deity a dozen conceived in cold blood, and on this sort of arithmetical extravagance there attends the usual nemesis, a suspicion of stinginess in prodigality, for if a dozen, why not a score? and if a score, why not several hundred?









### III

I MUST say more, though I say it reluctantly, for I am speaking of my foster-mother-country, about the failure of Hinduism to unify the imaginative life of its myriad adherents. Assuredly not as a child, and not till long after my return to India, did I become aware of this, but it was my experience of Hinduism as a child that taught me to see what seems to remain hidden from many Occidentals incomparably more learned in regard to that other India, the India of their scholarly imagining, and not the actual India. For I, who in childhood had known what a child might of the only sort of Hinduism valid for at least ninety-five per cent of Hindus, could but smile when I found, as I still find, alike in European books the most

learned and in outlines of knowledge for the Western man-in-the-street, a Hinduism which either never existed for the great majority of the people or which ceased to exist for them soon after the dawn of history. Even under a purely literary aspect the poetry of the supreme Sanskrit classics is not only not Indian, but not even broadly Oriental, being the poetry of an epoch when the several future branches of the Aryans were wandering in search of promised or problematical land. As for the religious aspect of the matter, the Hinduism with which I as a child was brought into friendly contact, and in my childhood I knew several of the sites most sacred to Hinduism, was remote indeed from what the professors and the gushers offer us as Hinduism. The smaller towns and even the larger villages in the very cradle of Hinduism had temples or shrines dedicated to one of the principal divine persons, Vishnu, or Siva, but it was not to those distant and uncomprehended gods that the bulk of the people had recourse in

any of their ordinary troubles. Rather did they go to some godling. It might be to a godling well advanced in promotion, and arrived either locally or over considerable portions of Hindu India at the dignity of doorkeeper to the temple of some very great deity, or it might be to one unknown outside the particular district and unrecognised by most of the local Brahmins. The Dwarapala, or concierge deity, so far as my memory of childish and adult observations now serves, was usually a very minor godling, but I recollect having seen effigies even of Hanuman at the entrance of temples into which they could not be admitted, and I think that in the days of my childhood in Northern India the effigy of Ganesa, a god to be invoked at the inception of every enterprise, was very much oftener outside the entrance to the temple of some greater deity than in enjoyment of any considerable shrine of his own.

The Hindus I knew so well as a child – by no means to be waved away as mere

servants, for they included many of other classes – rendered but a vague reverence to the deities whom the professors and the gushers present to us as the gods of all Hinduism. When with a child's morbidity I looked out, at a spot sacred to Hinduism, as the corpses went by to cremation, what I heard invariably was not the invocation of the two operative members of the Hindu trinity, but a cry to the hero of that Indian epic in which I had first been taught to read – *Rama, Rama ! Satya Nama !* A cry to "*The True Name.*" The professors can tell us that the North Indian Hindu greeting the sunrise with devotional gestures and the exclamation, "Suraj Narayan," is honouring Vishnu ; but a little child who was once in India can lead those misleaders to the truth that the average lower caste Hindu is merely reverting to the primitive nature worship.

It may be that my contact from infancy with Hinduism should have developed a more mystical turn of mind, and I do not

think I was an exceptionally unpromising lump to be leavened at any rate, in later life in our own literature, Vaughan and Traherne and Blake have meant a great deal to me, and I have had my time of curiosity about the two great Spanish mystic poets whom I can read only in translation. But the only mystical experience I can recall out of childhood may be one which would have befallen me anywhere, and certainly it was not directly consequent on anything I had learned from my conscious or unconscious Indian teachers.

I had it first in what the English in India amusingly call "the Hills," referring to the mightiest mountain system in the world. I had it as a child several times, and I had it once, I think less intensely, in maturity, again in the Himalayas. It was the experience, as nearly as I can describe it, of loss of identity, and the first time I had it, it ended with me in a frenzy of terror crying out my own name over and over again, without then knowing why, but

as I now suppose in an instinctive assertion of personality. I conjecture the experience to have been always induced by the audible silence so strangely to be found at times among those vast mountains. One moment one is walking along slopes and through woods full of the rumours of bird and animal life, and if it be towards evening probably full of the noise of the great tree-crickets ; the next moment, one is in some inexplicably silent fold of the hills, with the effect, at least in my own mature experience, of first finding one's sense of personality extremely sharpened, and then of feeling the almost physical draining out of personality. Perhaps it was for this as well as for the orthodox reasons that so many of the contemplatives of Hindu India chose or aspired to the mountains, though indeed the genuine adepts among them seem capable of abstraction from self almost anywhere.

Recalling the several childish and the one mature experience, I find myself wondering now, perhaps foolishly, what

would have happened if the instinct of self-assertion had not operated. Were I the right sort of writer about India, there would be no hesitation in answering that, as child or as young man, I should have been flooded with wisdom ; but in maturity I have seen enough of the wisdom which pours itself into the emptied cup to set no great store by it. Between that passivity and the intense imaginative energy with which the mystical Western artists dear to me have apprehended the other world, there seems to me a difference immeasurable. Is he who merely makes himself tinder to be credited with playing the part of Prometheus ?





## IV

DI



## IV

BUT these are matters much too high for me. The child about whom I am writing, except that he nearly always lacked playmates, and therefore played chiefly with creatures of his imagining or with the dog or the pony, was much as other little boys of his age. What I saw of the gentler wild life of the Himalayas, and you are to figure a child not in some remote camp but in the sophisticated "hill station," was fascinating to me. In particular, I liked the grey, black-faced, long-tailed monkey of the hills far more than the commonplace short-tailed monkey of the plains. The *langur* was a joy as he leaped from tree to tree purposefully, and still more a joy when out of sheer exuberance of spirits he performed acrobatically, unnecessarily

turning a somersault or so in the air between bough and bough, or challenging a friend in a race to the top of the tree. And then at lucky moments in the twilight there were flying squirrels, not flying truly, but planing, as we would now say, from a high tree on the upper hillside to somewhere near the base of a tree far down. Once, as my mother and I were being conveyed along a rather lonely road in a *dandy*, a sort of canoe-shaped sedan-chair, a leopard took the road in one bound from the banked-up hillside above us, and I was delighted by its grace, unaware of the slight element of danger. Leopards were fairly common on the outskirts of that "hill station," lurking about on the chance of picking up a dog, and it may be, aware that the dogs owned by Europeans were better nourished than those to be had far below on the verge of the incredibly smelly bazaar.

The bazaar itself fascinated me, not as bazaars fascinate the tourist: so far as a child might, I knew the meaning of its

many odours, only the heavy perfumes from certain balconied houses shuttered during the day being meaningless to my innocence. Nearly all the smells of Asia were concentrated into those few narrow and winding streets. There was less asafoetida than there would have been farther to the north-west, but there was enough, there was a contribution from semi-Mongol traders who preferred anointing themselves to washing, and had done the anointing with highly rancid fat, there was acrid smoke from the fuel characteristic of all that part of India, there was musk, and that aroma of sandalwood which is sacred but bears to the odour of sanctity pretty well the relation that an unfrocked priest bears with us to a good pastor. There were the stenchs of the narrow obstructed gutters, sometimes clogged still more by an influx of suicidal locusts. Redeemingly, there were wafts from the *halwai*, the confectioner, benevolently busy in making that sweet of curds which is called the *pera* and the hot

syrup crisped into amusing shapes called the *jelavi*. Forbidden delights! But did I not savour you in my childhood surreptitiously, and escape enteric until so very many years later, long returned from England, a perverse Antæus weakened by contact with his own earth, I contracted that disease from pseudo-European food?

There were a few signboards in English in that bazaar even then, nothing like as many as when I revisited the place some twenty years later, no longer tolerant of smells or avid for Oriental confectionery, and saw that an Indian baker described himself on a signboard as "Best Loafer," and a moment later was constrained to raise my sun-helmet as I passed one whose signboard declared him not only carpenter, ironworker, rickshaw-maker, etc., but "Maker of All Things."

I made as a child some curious friends in that bazaar, in particular a certain worker in wood in whose small dark shop one could spend half an hour very



A FEW SIGNBOARDS IN ENGLISH



pleasantly watching the progress of his work and listening to his really large repertory of what I must now call folk-tales but then regarded as soberly realistic narratives. My friend the woodworker, like a good many other Indian connoisseurs of stories, took special pleasure in those tales in which some arbitrary and fantastic condition is attached to the execution of a task in which the hero ultimately succeeds. The conditions were often not only arbitrary and fantastic, but the product of a Rabelaisian imagination, yet I cannot think that I came to any harm by being thus early acquainted with the grossness of popular North Indian folk-tales. He was a Hindu, and it was only from a few of my Mahomedan friends that I ever had narratives with a tinge of the characteristic colour of the *Arabian Nights*. In a way these latter spoilt me for the *Arabian Nights* themselves, which, when I had come to the eager reading of English, pleased me but little, and to the strange merits of which I did not really

become alive until I was mature As readily as anyone would I subscribe now to Henley's splendid eulogy of that book which, as he says, is hashish made words, that vast extravaganza of buffoonery and poetry, with its abrupt alternations between parvenu felicity on silken cushions and the undeserved bastinado I can see now that nothing even remotely comparable with the *Arabian Nights* could have emanated from the Hindu mind, immensely fertile as that mind is in mythology For, in the first place, the world of the *Arabian Nights*, so far as it is peopled with human beings, is in its own queer way democratic, with the democracy of Islam, a social system which has never allowed the idea of permanent dominance or permanent subjection to enter it, and in the second place, the Mahommedan mind is religiously precluded from multiplying gods or in any way tampering with the firmly and finally declared celestial constitution, and where the myth-making Hindu mind escapes into a wearisome liberty, the Mahommedan is

constrained to invention within decreed limits. Accepted limits, order even in extravagance, the geometrical qualities which are so refreshing in the finest Mahommedan architecture in India, these were the qualities, however dimly felt by me in childhood, which gradually drew a young mind, so pleasantly biased by Hinduism, towards the elements of Mahommedan culture.

Hindu culture or Mahommedan, the point to be made, for what little it may be worth, is that I came to these cultures quite naturally, not as so many of our discoverers of the East come to them in the quest for picturesqueness or for a new religion. I grew up in the country itself, discovering little by little what the spiritual explorers discover suddenly with effects on them and on India, and on the stupider sections of the public in England and America, which are deeply deplorable. It may be I have the right to say it, and at any rate I will say that even incapacity to feel what is spiritual in India

is better than the vague frenzies of those on whom the actual or imputed spirituality of India acts as an intoxicant





v



## V

SUPERIOR persons have said very offensive things about what, using the term with its old signification, I will still call Anglo-Indian society. To me in maturity, for all that as a journalist I fell into none of the recognised category, and therefore had some moments of social friction, Anglo-Indian Society seemed a gesture of excellent, if unconscious, wit and wisdom in face of the mystery and peril of India. Round the crude, whitewashed bungalow that served as Club in small up-country stations there might lie all the strangeness of the East, but within the Club the half dozen jaded white men made naught of it. Innumerable deities and princes of the powers of the air might be abroad on the wings of the Indian night, but these men





POWERS OF THE AIR MIGHT BE ABROAD  
ON THE WINGS OF THE NIGHT

drink their "pegs" played their pool or game of cards, told each other their stale stories, and intimated in their own way that they were no whit overawed. In instinctive confidence, or with the subtly reasoned confidence which was my father's, they even left their children exposed, at the hour at which all things are credible, to whatever India might say herself, as she recovered supremacy with the quick-coming darkness or that superstitious native servants might babble.

In my memory as I write this it is late evening at N——. My parents are not yet returned to the house from the Club. In that hot weather the dinner table has been laid for them on the *chabutra*, the low cement platform in the garden. It is my ambition to be wide awake when they do return from the Club, but I grow drowsy as I sit on the veranda with the servants nine or ten of them squatting about me according to their rank and the utterly untouchable sweeper many feet away from any other of the servants. Only half



AS I SIT ON THE VERANDA WITH THE  
SERVANTS

wake I watch the multitudinous fire-flies in the pomegranate-trees, and in some sort listen to the tales that are being told for my delectation by one or other of the servants. Queer tales to be told a child at bedtime : approaches. One is from a Hindu servant who knows a man who knows another man who had the narrowest of escapes from the talons of a *pisacha*. A *pisacha* is the ghost of an imperfectly cremated Hindu, haunting the burning *ghauts* to consume human flesh whether lightly done or totally unfired. But the *pisacha* it is agreed is nothing to the *churel* the ghost of a woman who has died in childbirth and who seduces living men to a terrible death. It is objected that the *churel*, with all her lascivious charms, can be easily identified and avoided by any who will observe her retorted feet. And then *churels* are not so very numerous their numbers are kept down by driving nails into the feet of the corpse or by putting a kind of iron foot-cuff on it (Twenty years later I learnt by chance

that some snake-charmers very highly prize, for their business, certain small bones from the bodies of women who have died in childbirth, and that in one part of India elaborate precautions are taken by the relatives of the deceased to avoid the dishonour of having portions of a valued aunt used in the pacification of cobras.)

Stories went on, the powers of the Indian night had me at their disposal, and still somehow I was kept by my own people. My eventual transfer to England contributed to that end otherwise than might have been expected. India did not become more remote for me: with so much around me from which to recoil, I withdrew myself often from my environment to live in memories of India. It was no case of home-sickness: never during even the earliest days in England did I doubt where my home really was, and it would have been strange indeed, if, descending from that Johanes de Wellebi who held a knight's fee and a half at Welby in 1135 by what the *Liber Niger*

of Henry III called ancient tenure, through ancestors who continuously held land thereabouts, I had been irresponsive to the intimate appeal of the English countryside. Here, after the wild and unfriendly profusion of nature in India, was nature friendly and, as with maturer mind I might have thought, actually collaborating with man—nature so friendly, as even the young mind could note, that the animals went securely to their sleep in the open fields. How often in camp in India had I seen played on a goat the rather cruel jest of leading it out at sundown for a hundred yards or so, of releasing it at the first approach of darkness, and of observing how, nose to human heel, it would in terror of wild animals follow the man who had taken it out through every strange pattern of movement he chose to make. The beauty and friendliness of English fields seen direct, then the enhancing reflection of those fields in certain secondary masters of English pastoral painting, such as Calvert

whom I most improbably discovered ere long, these were great gifts from my own country. Greater still was the gift of English poetry so suddenly bestowed that, for a while, it was almost too much for me and I went about dazed. But not for all these things did I forget my India. And there were things to set in the balance.

I know now, what I could not possibly know as a schoolboy, that India had done me one inestimable good in guarding me from the vulgarity which startled and pained me in my own country. The blatant hoardings, to speak of nothing worse, were a wonder and a horror to a boy not brought up with such things. Under a myriad exhibitions of the ugly commonness lying at the base, and aspiring to the apex, of our civilisation, and seeing about me no one whom these things seemed to trouble, I withdrew into myself, I learnt with great rapidity the art of making my own fable of life and of treating as things that did not exist the things which hurt and were meaningless.

Many years in my life have been meaningless to me. As of my school in England, though a couple of the masters were kind to me and I got on well enough with most of the boys, I can recall only the belief of Form IIB that the daughter of the headmaster had webbed feet and an unfair advantage in the sea, so out of an Indian year, after my return, I can only remember my experience with the frogs. But what an experience ! It shall have, as it deserves, a paragraph to itself.









## VI

I WAS then at A——, where the frogs were nothing like as bad as I have known them in some other parts of India, but were bad enough. I took the usual precaution in a country of open doors of having a board eighteen inches high put up in every doorway, but always there would be from ten to twenty frogs hopping about my rooms. Day after day I had my head servant catch these creatures, and take them out in a waste-paper basket to the gate, and there deposit them. In time, I wondered whether all the frogs in A—— visited my house in turn or the same frogs revisited me after their ejection. And on a Sunday morning I told that same servant to tie round the middle of each frog he deported a piece of red tape,

that they might be identified on the morrow if they stubbornly returned. And then I forgot all about this ; and going out, picked up a young man of my acquaintance to come back with me to pot-luck. When the meal was over, and we were stretched in those admirable Indian chairs which rest the legs and fix the gaze heavenward, so that one does not observe the events on the floor, my guest squirmed and squirmed while I contemplated the ceiling of the veranda and discoursed at large. Till at last he cried out, after long speculation whether his was sober vision, "I say, old chap, do you keep frogs as pets ? " I heaved in my long chair, looked down, and there on the veranda were many frogs belted with red tape and indeed apparently rather disposed to think that with this livery they had received the freedom of the house.

One of the points in this anecdote is the calm and absolutely unsmiling acquiescence of that servant of mine in my request that tape should be put round the



"I SAY, OLD CHAP,  
DO YOU KEEP FROGS  
AS PETS ?"

frogs. Only a servant's obedience? But listen to this story out of another part of India, where all the local notables of, I admit, a rather remote district gathered in perfect seriousness when, at a time of drought, a certain white official, mentally affected by overwork and hell's heat, summoned them to see him bring down rain by dispatching into the clouds a vulture with a home-made bomb appended to it. The local notables attended and observed with unmoved faces the efforts of the accursed and heavily burdened fowl to flap upwards. Even when with a fuse burning, it perched on the apex of the official's thatched roof, and he became concerned for things other than rain, they kept their places and their countenances: this too, doubtless, was part of the performance. It was only when an explosion removed all of the vulture and some of the official's roof without precipitating rain that they felt something had gone wrong with the programme. But my argument is of years and places which seemingly

yielded nothing except matter for a frivolous tale. In fact those years and places yielded much else, as I withdrew myself from tiresome set circumstances to follow my own interests. The more I was bored by the inappropriate surroundings assigned me by fate, the more I depended for amusement on the rediscovery of India. And, out of my childhood, I had the means of rediscovering it.

I had heard the talk that is not talked before white men, and had only to use a catchword out of it to find myself on another footing.









## VII

ONCE I was travelling by camel-cart. There are few more amusing ways of travel. The cart is a double-decker, and the white man exceptionally obliged to use this conveyance bespeaks the whole of the upper deck, on which, when it has been duly scoured, he has his bedding spread out, for this is travel by night. Well, I was travelling by camel-cart, and with it were many bullock-carts, moving along the greatest road in the world, and the carters in the fashion of that part of Northern India were chanting in turn portions of the most popular poem of that countryside. From one part would come the first line of a couplet, very slowly chanted, and then after nearly a minute would come from another cart the second line of

the couplet. There was need of the long recitation, not only to beguile might be for some the tedium of the way, but to scare off innumerable hobgoblins, and to intimate to *dacoits* that the caravan was alert. To be sure, there were those on the lower deck of the camel-cart who were candidates for sleep, but the Indian of rural India seems to sleep all the more happily for being frequently and raucously disturbed, and in his villages is glad of the watchman who goes round bawling at two and three and four o'clock of a morning, "Be wakeful, for this is the hour when thieves come!" For myself I was moved to see whether I could anywhere catch up the chanter of the first line of a couplet, and though much had drained out of my memory there came the moment when I could do so. Surprise, and then laughter up and down the line of carters. The young white gentleman could join in! And then, for all that I failed miserably in completing nearly every couplet thereafter thrown out to me in friendly challenge,



" BE WAKEFUL, FOR THIS IS THE HOUR  
WHEN THIEVES COME ! "

I was on terms with them. Next day I could have produced quite a neat little report on the joys and woes of carters in that part of the country.

The camel-cart, the bullock-cart, and other such indigenous conveyances, were well known to me at one time, but they were for trips across country, where there was no railway service, and usually for shooting-trips. My main journeys were inevitably done by rail, and whatever the sophistication of the train may be supposed to bring with it, I had my profit of Indian travelling companions in the train too. Once there came into my carriage an old Hindu gentleman almost over-refined of feature. Only the nobility of the broad brow and the firm set of the lips saved that beautiful face from a charge of being overdaintily modelled. He was dressed very simply in a white *dhoti* (long loin-cloth) and a white cloth swathed round his torso, but the cloth was of the finest quality and laundered to a perfect candour. He used wooden sandals, to call them that, and the

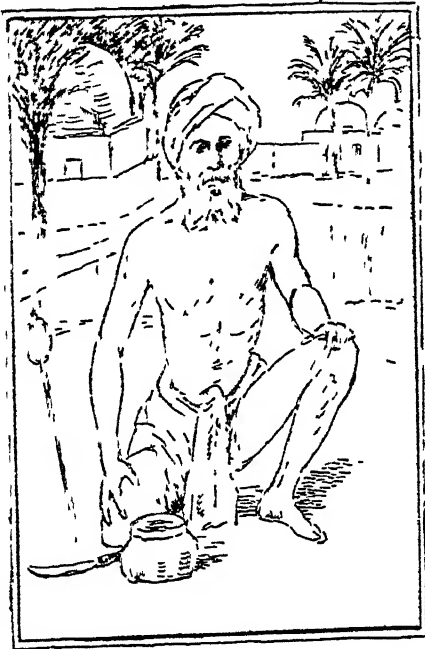
exposed feet, thin though they were and with the veins of old age showing, were modellers' work. His hands were frail and beautiful. It had taken, we will suppose, three thousand years of breeding to the one purpose to produce that Brahmin, and in him the process seemed justified. Caste has given India cruelties too heart-breaking to contemplate and many of the institutions of high-caste Hinduism have enfeebled the supreme caste in body and left it with an intellect apt for little but the splitting of hairs, but it is only fair to acknowledge that once in a way Brahminism throws up a man like my travelling companion.

I asked him how far he was travelling, a matter of concern in that country where a journey may be one of anything from eighteen to forty-eight hours. He replied, "To Benares" and I was obtuse enough not to catch the significance of what he told me. He saw my failure, and after a little while added gently that he was going to Benares because he had now entered on



the last stage of the true Brahminical life, the renunciation of all things worldly and of all family ties to undertake meditation in a sacred place. "I have taught long enough, I now go to learn," he said smilingly, and I think not a little pleased with the neatness of his summarising phrase. At intervals during the many hours that we travelled together I thought of that distinguished and dainty old gentleman sitting half naked among the saints and charlatans of the sacred and filthy city, making his fine mind a blank that there might enter into it—what? No! despite my Indian childhood I was too Western to reconcile myself to such waste of character and intellect.

Who would not feel privileged to have such a travelling companion as that Brahmin gentleman? And many a time in Northern and Southern India did I readily share a railway compartment with some Indian who had completely adopted English modes in certain matters. But it would be hypocrisy to pretend that I or



THAT DISTINGUISHED AND DAINTY  
OLD GENTLEMAN

any other Englishman going by train was not made somewhat anxious by the prospect of an Indian fellow traveller. It was no question of colour prejudice or racial arrogance, as it was so often made out to be by the worst sort of tourist or stay-at-home Friend of India. If you were going to be together for twenty-four hours or so you were both going to use the sanitary convenience attached to your compartment, and, to put things very mildly, a proportion of Indian travellers used it otherwise than we of the West. Then there were those, in their own place no doubt excellent citizens, who chewed betel-nut and squirted the red juice on the floor of the carriage. Again, there were those who made themselves almost entirely nude, and offered to un-enthusiastic Western eyes the spectacle of perspiration coursing over their bodies. And, for a few specially luckless white travellers, there could be a companion of that sect which holds it wrong to destroy any animal life whatsoever, and at night

on a journey gathers parasites off the body into a little box and in the morning returns them to the body, thus insuring the continuance of food supply for God's most objectionable creatures. But many among Indians who have not adopted Western ways were constrained by natural gentlemanliness to avoid behaviour which would cause offence to a European fellow traveller, and among the coarser types of Europeans there were those whose boorishness provoked some Indians into asserting their indisputable right to travel first class so long as they had a first-class ticket. The asserting of this right was sometimes effected, without ascertaining the point of view of the individual white man concerned, with a quite needless truculence. But I would not leave the impression that all Indians who asserted their right were unpleasant persons.

At M—— some twenty of us used to take, what sounds very English and suburban, an office train from the residential to the business part of the city, and

a very large first-class carriage was attached to the morning train for our accommodation. One day two highly self-conscious young Indians, obviously students, entered our carriage with a brave strut, but then were abashed because as we all knew each other well there was a great deal of talk and chaff going on, while the representatives of India had no one with whom to converse. At last one of the students plucked up courage to say to his friend at the top of his voice, "I fear poor Ramaswami has committed an unfortunate matrimony." To which his friend, seeking for support from some English proverb which ought to have existed, replied, "But so he has buttered his bed, so he must lie on it." Our laughter was very loud, but the two young Indians realised that it was not in the least ill-natured, and all was well.

All these travelling companions by road and rail, and types innumerable encountered otherwise, were part of what hasty writers here sometimes call "the people of



" BUT SO HE HAS BUTTERED HIS BED,  
SO HE MUST LIE ON IT "

India." Never were there more peoples brought together under one political system, peoples at every stage of evolution from that of primitive man to that of the twentieth century. Apart from the Census officials, who handle some queer stuff, there are persons in the pay of the Government whose business it is to report for the benefit of anthropologists on the multitudinous castes and tribes of India. I knew one who was anxious to obtain accurate measurements of a certain obscure jungle tribe, and with endless patience and tact camped about in their tract of malarious jungle, offering all sorts of bribes for even one man and one woman of the tribe to come in for ten minutes and be measured, though an average struck from one of each sex would be something of an oddity. All his efforts were in vain : the tribe did not altogether get out of reach, and it exhibited no hostility, but it receded about half a day's march beyond the limit of each march he made. At last, in despair, he decided to

keep his camp where it was at the moment and to send a new emissary, heavily laden with the trinkets and gauds appealing to the tribesmen to discover why they would not let him have the least touch with them. The eventual answer was that they quite understood the desire of the Government to catch, kill, stuff, and exhibit one male and one female of their tribe, but that no male or female was willing to be the individual chosen. Note, or you miss the whole point of the story, that the tribe as a whole did not wish to turn against the intruding scientist with bows and arrows or to rebel against the Government. The attitude of its members was: Let this thing be done so long as it is not done to me individually and that will be, in matters less horrific than killing and stuffing, the attitude of many millions of Indians well above the cultural level of any jungle tribe towards any Government that operates in India for decades to come.





## VIII

THE Government of India and the Provincial Governments have to live up to an enormous variety of popular conceptions of them. No Government in Europe or on the American continent is called to a task in any degree comparable. "Ma - Bap !" says the North Indian villager when the British official approaches him : " You are my father and my mother ! " and over vast areas of rural India it is this paternal view of Government that prevails among these same masses, and not only among them is it felt that the punishment of crime is not a matter for society as a whole operating through Government, but wholly a matter for the Government itself. There are at the very least, even to-day, one

hundred and fifty million people in India who would better appreciate a summary and capricious administration of justice, so that it were not wholly impersonal, than the elaborate and orderly system of justice which we have established. Let me give you a case in point. In a certain large Native State in Southern India there was a village which for some generations had paid a tax imposed on no other. There came the day of financial and other reforms in that State, and it was discovered that this impost had been placed on the village because at some date towards the end of the eighteenth century a nobleman of the Court had there been thrown from his horse, which the villagers had not been successful in catching. Now the point is, that these villagers had gone on paying the special tax for several generations without ever putting up a petition against it, simply because it was thoroughly intelligible to them as, first, the arbitrary act of a ruler, and as, second, a thing quite definitely related to an

individual. They would have murmured, even in that State, had there been through all those years imposed on them a special tax for the betterment of their condition or in the name of some abstract good. Well, great masses of the people in British India still think at the backs of their minds pretty much in that way, and any Government that is going to live in India by general favour instead of by its own power will have more or less to satisfy minds like that as well as minds indistinguishable in their public utterances from those of our own members of Parliament.

And here we touch in the accidental way of these rambling reminiscences on a mystery towards the elucidation of which I can offer no assistance. How does it come about that so many Indians of unquestionable ability in becoming public men develop minds like public meetings? One got, naturally in my trade of journalism, to know a number of them pretty well, and from time to time one supposed that the public meeting would be over,

that something of the ordinary man would emerge, and that it would be possible to converse on some basis a little less lofty and a little more favourable to the development of friendship than the platform. But, in nine cases out of ten, no ! There was one man, since come to a very considerable political eminence, with whom I had hopes of a sort for years ; but, to the end of our acquaintance, meeting him was simply attending public meetings in endless succession. I believe he grudged even that minute of hand-shaking and conventional enquiry after each other's health as time stolen from that allotted to the agenda. It never actually happened to me, but I generally expected that our tête-à-tête talks would finish by his asking me to second a resolution. Alas ! in course of time I became disinclined even to move on behalf of an audience of one a vote of thanks to the speaker. Presumably he relaxed somewhere, but when I discreetly questioned his Indian friends I got the impression that it was not with them.

Yet he was a man with an acute mind and has since proved that he is capable of getting some things done otherwise than merely on paper, or in a peroration. In the years of which I am thinking I used to contemplate this man so clearly marked out for political success and certain others with a wonder how, if they were put in a position to govern India, they would legislate and administrate for whole human beings. That they would produce very fine measures for the political fraction of man, or rather for that sub-fraction which goes to public meetings, was evident but what on earth would they do when required to provide for the general welfare of the peoples of India, many of them so unlike anybody's notion of the ideal habitué where things are "carried unanimously," some of them indeed apt to prefer violence to the niceties of academic debate. The answer to what perplexed me will not be fully forthcoming for another five or six years, but some portion of it was made

available in instalments long before I left India, notably in the matter of Social Reform.









## IX

THE Fort was an anachronism, I admit, but not nearly so much of a survivor beyond due date as you might suppose. In that part of Northern India, two reasonably long lives were then long enough to take men back to the days when the *pax Britannica* was only just being established, and the grandfathers of my host's retainers had served a soldier of fortune.

A diminutive affair of thick mud walls enclosing not much more than an acre of ground, and with no pride left to it except that of the great gateway of carved and inlaid red sandstone over which a quasi-military guard was mounted night and day out of mere routine. Within, a circle made by a thinner and lower mud wall merely to separate the

master's residence from the quarters of the retainers ; within that a two-storied house of white stone, with windows filled in with lace-work carved stone and doorways that had no doors, so that split cane or heavily quilted curtains had to be hung against all of them. Everywhere the sensation of looking on things tarnished in the denial to them of their immemorial and right uses. Have you ever visited mews, mews in the very oldest sense, that had suffered long neglect, and seen the hawks wearied and weakened by their inactivity, peevishly stretching, from their blocks on perches, wings that were meant for the ecstasy of the chase ? Well, the people in the Fort and the semi-feudal tenants in the neighbouring villages brought that image to my mind several times during the two long visits I had paid to a host who seemed to have lost all interest in his ancestral vocation, and to have discovered nothing else of interest in life.

Insignificant as the Fort - holding no

more than a bodyguard, and drawing on no more than a few hundred adventurers outside – must always have seemed, the place had been the starting-point for raids that covered more territory than is constituted by a dozen English counties. The sword of the old soldier of fortune, now a mere ornament on the wall of one of the upper rooms in his grandson's residence, was bought dear, and always found worth the money by those who still affected to rule great principalities. Speed and immeasurable audacity and a flair for the cavalry warfare of that period ensured that the old soldier of fortune should never lack an employer, and on a day his own countrymen gave rank and reward to the old soldier of fortune for that he had never been bribable into fighting against them, and gave him confirmation of the villages he held by right of capture long ago and took from him and his men, they too well rewarded, all that had made their lives worth living. As I drove in at dusk of a sharp North Indian December day, I

could see well enough in the Fort what had come to the place and its people from the blessing of the long peace.

My host, revealed by a flaring torch held by a servant, awaited me a few steps in front of the house made gloomy by heavy curtains. I knew well enough that since the time of his great grandfather no marriage had brought European blood into the family, and that it would be idle to expect in my host's appearance any reminder of his grandfather, the old soldier of fortune ; but when he had taken me within, into a small room full of guns and derelict books, with its good corner of comfort by a strong fire, I was taken aback at the look of him. To my knowledge he was only in the late forties, and already he had fallen into the obesity and indolence which descends early on the Oriental not absolutely compelled to exertion, and apparently even earlier on many persons of mixed blood. He had had some reputation as a horseman where that reputation is not easily won, and I



MY HOST AWAITED ME A FEW STEPS  
IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE

discovered for myself on the only day he ever came out shooting with me that he was an altogether exceptional snipe shot, but the man who moved heavily across the little room to get me a drink in welcome looked as if he had lived soft all his days. His face, much darker than that of the average well-born Indian, had traces of good looks above but had run to jowl ; his body so much suggested inertia that once he was seated it was difficult to imagine him ever moving again.

And indeed, when he had poured our first two drinks, he could not be at the pains of stretching forth his hand to pour their successors. That was done by his wife, who strode into the room presently, a tall and splendid figure in her well-judged Indian dress, the costume of a Mahommedan lady, wide trousers tightened at the ankle, and over a quilted vest the cloth which covers head and shoulders. She was from near the Frontier, of aristocratic origin and of a frankness which I suppose may be partly explicable by

those two facts but which remains utterly unmatched in my necessarily restricted experience of Eastern women. She was ready enough to talk, but it was not to that end that we were met. Her function, at a flicker of her husband's eyelid or the slightest gesture of his hand, was to fill our miniature tumblers with half-and-half of whisky and water without disturbing the reverie into which he had lapsed. By the rule of the master of the house, for three fourths of the time to dinner we drank Scotch, for the other fourth Canadian Club. My host never drank anything till this time of the day, and never drank anything after it. His habit of life was simple: a stroll in the morning round the tiny garden which startled the eye with its profusion of jessamine and marigolds, a *chota hazri* of chupattis, prolonged brown study in an easy chair, on the veranda if the weather permitted, an almost purely Oriental and very heavy meal at one o'clock, a long siesta, those two hours of concentrated, almost entirely





HER FUNCTION WAS TO FILL OUR  
TUMBLERS WITHOUT DISTURBING  
THE REVERIE

spent drinking a light evening meal a cigar and, surprisingly, some conversation then bed

On what my host meditated I could never discover To the affairs of his still very considerable estate over which by the terms of the British Government's gift to his grandfather he was absolute lord, he seemed to give no attention waving aside his capable Mahommedan steward when approached on any matter He had fits of generous charity towards his people and was invariably kind, familiar, and in jest on the rare occasions when he saw any of them, for weeks at a time he never went outside the outer wall of the Fort, and of the degradation between the inner and outer walls where horses with noblest Arab blood in them had been allowed down several generations to contract the grossest misalliances, I think he chose to have no knowledge Except that he was punctilious about courtesies and enquiries when he met a guest first thing in the morning, and carefully produced half an

hour's talk after dinner, the presence of a guest seemed to have scarcely any effect on him : alone or not, for hours he sat in his well-filled armchair, brooding on heaven knows what.

X



## X

I THREW out a hint to his steward who had snatched a day from his busy life to come out snipe shooting with me, and all I got in reply was *Yahin bahut khyli bat hain* ( 'Here there is much dream talk' ) I had heard none from my host, and I got none out of the literal-seeming retinue that went with me whenever I was out shooting, except once. The men, rather a ragamuffin crew, though keeping a queer touch of the army still about them, were nearly all very dark and somewhat coarse of feature, even here and there with that hint of Abyssinian blood which you would often find (for an historical reason into which I cannot now enter) in some of the descendants of the irregular soldiery of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century

Among them I noticed one young man fairer and more aquiline of feature, of Pathan origin perhaps. To him late in the day, when shooting had worn off whatever little constraint there was, I privately and wickedly put the question what would happen to all these resigned and bored *jawans* (young men, but really soldiers or potential soldiers) in the event of a grand break-up in India. "As you can see, Sahib, by looking at them, their fathers did not know how to beget sons, but if once more there were riding some of them would ride." And first and last that was all I heard during two visits to the Fort to tell me that anyone on the estate gave a thought to the old days and to the causes of the ennui that had descended on all of them. Yet I do not doubt that the steward, who was himself the grandson of a squadron leader in the old irregular force and who knew all these people profoundly, was right when he said that there was a good deal of dream talk. The old military tradition lingered on, queerly revealing

itself where one least looked for it. There was an old emaciated, still vigorous grotesque of a man, making his livelihood as the shikari, who checked the depredations of wild pig and blue-bull in the crops of half a dozen villages who on a day began to gabble to me what were obviously military commands, but what remained to me mere noise except for the sharply reiterated "Grand flax", and, on a sudden, light broke on me and I said to myself, ' Good Lord, he is saying, Ground firelocks, he is as old as *that* ' But I would dwell now not so much on his age, taking him back to the era before the percussion cap was invented, as on the astonishing way in which an old military tradition, particularly if it be illegitimate, will linger on in parts of martial Northern India. I have not heard it, but there are men no older than myself who have caught on Indian lips the eighteenth-century French drill book of the masters who dined with us British for India, and indeed, only a few years ago, an inspecting



British officer found some Imperial Service troops in Cashmir being drilled quite naturally in French.

Think on that, and remember that when you have officially covered up a thing in India, and said it is not, it likely enough lingers on somewhere. What my friend the aged shikari was doing with his gabble of archaic English foot drill, where all about him were only the descendants of an irregular cavalry, I have not the slightest idea ; but I doubt not that to this day there are in many out-of-the-way parts of British India, let alone certain Native States, not merely greybeards, but potential fighters, cherishing obsolete teaching, with that of all good teaching which never becomes obsolete.

My host at the Fort derived from but one of the minor soldiers of fortune who found their opportunity before British power was pushed right to the Frontier. For the descendants of adventurers far more famous or infamous it was even thirty years ago far too late to look ; where any

left a family always it had Oriental blood in it always the indisposition to care actively for its heritage And if by arduous research you were now to discover the descendants of their troopers, you would not find them conscious of their ancestry My Fort was exceptional, which is partly why I have dwelt on it But draw your wide inference that still in parts of Northern India, whether or no any adventurer of European blood ever established himself there there are those for whom the great peace has been the numbing of every nerve of delight

Of course, it is impossible that there should come home to the mind of the reader in England any true idea of how utterly unbalanced the natural military power in India is, of how very militant are powerful minorities crowded away to the North-West, and of how unmilitant beyond European conception are the huge populations to the West and South It was easy enough for me to think of such things as I jogged back in the dusk in a

jostle of born freebooters on their beastly, squealing, fighting stallions ; it is not easy for the stay-at-home. To begin with, you cannot grasp without a violent effort of the imagination what the word non-militant means when applied to certain huge populations in India. Everyone of us in Europe has an ancestry that any swashbuckler might envy ; the most peaceful little tradesman or clerk has in his veins the blood of scores of fighters. But in India you may find vast communities that for a thousand or even two thousand years have known nothing of the sword except the feel of its edge when applied by a conqueror. At the other extreme, and geographically concentrated in the North-West, are communities that for centuries have borne the sword by habit, faith, zest, generation after generation. The contrast is unique. The great province of Bengal, with a population roughly equal to that of Great Britain, can yield not one single soldier for our Indian army, which is, and for more than half a

century has been recruited strictly with a view to taking all suitable and rejecting all unsuitable material. The Punjab, with only half that population, contributes 86,000 first-rate fighting men to that army. Thus well over half the indigenous military power of India is derived from a single province and if to the contribution of the Punjab we add some 16,000 men from the neighbouring United Provinces, and some 7,000 from Rajputana, which borders on the Punjab to the North and the United Provinces to the East, we have, virtually, all the good fighting material which India proper yields. The friendly State of Nepal across the border, friendly to the British through thick and thin, but not under British, or destined to be under Indian control, supplies nearly 20,000 admirable soldiers. For the rest, except that there is a rather useful 7,000 from the vast province of Bombay, you may journey through provinces as large, in an instance, as France or, in another instance, as Spain, and know yourself

among populations with no aptitude for arms, and containing important communities that have been bred down the ages to be incapable of doing so.





## XI

FORGIVE me if I seem to turn aside from my trickle of reminiscences and to labour a point like a leader-writer. In the days when I was a leader-writer, editor of a daily in India I was careful to abstain from the notorious rupee-and-virgin cliché,

Were the British to withdraw from India, within a month there would be neither a rupee nor a virgin in Bengal " But it was impossible for an Englishman knocking about among the martial peoples of the Punjab and the United Provinces, and aware of the South-West and the South, to refrain altogether from speculation about the course of events if races so disparate were left to adjust matters for themselves. I do not know that much thinking or dreaming went on in the generally rather



thick heads of the races that give us our finest Indian soldiers : but this thing was brought home to me hundreds of times in earlier wanderings and during the period of my serious journalistic labours – that the idea of permanence in rule can never be grasped by the fighting races, nor indeed by nine-tenths of the Indian populace anywhere. India has known so many empires : there have been no less than seven Imperial Delhis. It was amidst the ruins of one of the old Delhis that an old Mahomedan gentleman, of whom I had asked the way to some ampler group of buildings, once glorious with the pomp of a conqueror, said to me, “ Here are the Lords of Dust till they are blown else whither.” The idea of the evanescence of empire has haunted the Indian mind through triumphal no less than through decadent epochs. Even those who made the greatest of Indian Empires, the very Moguls, knew and openly avowed that power was ephemeral. Why, in that very City of Victory, Fatchpur Sikri, how

often staying there in the rooms kept by Government for guests who would have the deserted city to themselves of an evening, how often have I read on one of the proudest of man's monuments, The world is a bridge, said Jesus pass over it but build not upon it - and in how many other of the proudest of the old Mogul buildings may one not detect

*In capital and corridor  
The pathos of the conqueror*

The peoples of India have never been convinced that our rule was permanent, and now they know that it is to be modified and attenuated until it disappears. Not yet have the martial peoples crowded together in the North-West of India begun to dream new dreams of opportunities when political power does not coincide with military power. It is likely that the dreaming may be long postponed by the sagacity with which the Simon Commission has devised a plan for keeping the control of the Indian army

in exclusively British hands for a lengthy and undefined transitional stage. But it is absurd to suppose that those who have regarded every *Raj*, up to and including the British, as temporary, will suddenly accept the new indigenous government as based on everlasting rock. The fighters among them keep – and sometimes as if these were things of yesterday – their old memories, and it is certain that when the Indian army is at last transferred to the ostensible control of an indigenous authority, fighting men here and there will enquire at what date and by virtue of what power the non-martial races acquired the right to order them about. I have often enough talked with the elders and the young men of villages from which, decade after decade, the recruits come, and I speak with adequate knowledge of the minds of some, at any rate, of the fighting races of Northern India.

A movement in the admirably steady Indian army would be a sinister development, and one without precedent since

1857 Seditiousists have tried often enough during the last twenty-five years to tamper with the loyalty of the army to the British Crown, but being, in God's dispensation, peculiarly unable to understand the psychology of the fighting races, have used the most foolish of arguments in appealing to 1857 The army contains no elements willing to be reminded of the Mutiny where the thing is not brushed away as an irrelevance it is regretted as a discredit, but the feeling it chiefly arouses is boredom, unless native soldiers are confronted with some memorial of the work the loyal units in 1857 did on the side of the British at Delhi or elsewhere And it is particularly to be noted by those here who work the Irish analogy, and get themselves hopelessly wrong in consequence, that 1857 excites no feelings among the general population of the area of that terrible outburst With two minor exceptions, I have visited every place famous or notorious in the history of the Mutiny, I have lived in several, my

childhood, when the Mutiny was not thirty years old, was spent in part near the place of a siege and in part in the place of the supreme massacre of British captives. Never but once did I hear any significant allusion to the Mutiny, though a child's ears will catch a thousand things that are kept from the ears of elders. In the year of Queen Victoria's first jubilee, though not as far as I remember coincidentally with any loyal demonstration, a wild-eyed Indian, probably, I now think, under the influence of *bhang* or *ganja* or some other drug, went about the roads at R—— for a few hours screaming out that he had been in the Mutiny and was not to be put upon by the upstart British. The bazaar took him with indifference where he was not actually repelled. And it is quite safe to say that, with the exception of a few score of denationalised seditionists lurking on the Continent or in America and a few hundred degenerate young intellectuals in Bengal, no Indian has regarded or now regards the Mutiny as a

national effort or cherishes any bitterness about the sometimes very drastic methods used in its suppression. An English intellectual, whose Indian friends were presumably of a certain political complexion, has endeavoured to persuade us that numbers of sensitive Indians think of such an avenger as Neil in much the way that we think of the arch-criminal of Cawnpore, Nana Sahib. It is sheer nonsense. Whatever little feeling has been laboriously worked up is confined to the descendants of Indians who emphatically did not take part in the Mutiny, members of communities whose traditional part in great commotions is being spurned aside as not worth killing by either party. The Mutiny is not thought of by any of the fighting races of India as providing any sort of a precedent, and if ever the disastrous day should come when the militant minority of the North-West, constitutionally incapable of politics and only too likely to feel itself out-manceuvred politically, finds itself disposed to seek redress by force, its actions

will be such as cannot now be calculated.

It cannot be too plainly said, and, in all the years I knew India, I never came upon any historical grievance rankling in the mind of any considerable community. There was one great Native State with an historic dispute which, however, in no way affected its loyalty to a paramount power ; but inside British India I never heard of a single event of the distant past the memory of which inflamed the mind of even a particular community. To have talked to any landowner or peasant or trader about the outrageous Clive and the intolerable Warren Hastings, and to have asked whether they did not burn to avenge the defeat at Plassey, would have been to excite stares of complete non-comprehension. Already some feeble efforts were being made by two or three poor specimens of the Indian intelligentsia to work up feeling with false versions of Indian history, but they were of no avail. The one really strong movement, and one directed with great skill, was B. G. Tillak's

Mahratta renaissance But though Tillak's movement led, and in his own intention was always meant to lead, to hostility against Great Britain, as far as the bulk of the adherents went they were actuated by pride in the past of their race rather than by resentment against any particular act of the British. It was devotion to the memory of Shivaji, not animosity against any British ruler or soldier of the past, which drove them, and but for Tillak's scheming the movement need not have brought about conflict with the British.

But thirty or twenty years ago my friends among the castes from which recruits are drawn did not speculate on remote contingencies ! The Indian politician, if exceptionally they had at all heard of him, was a being who moved academic resolutions in the wholly irresponsible body known as the Indian National Congress. The animosities of my friends were local, and usually concentrated on the village moneylender, whose actuarial expectation of life in the absence of



British authority would perhaps not have exceeded the time required for getting a knife out of a sheath. Their indebtedness, like the indebtedness of most in rural India, was fantastic, and incurred almost wholly for non-productive purposes and always at rates of interest which Shylock would hesitate to charge. A daughter's wedding, dowry, and wedding feast taken together, meant anything from five to ten years' cruel indebtedness, and there were those who were in debt for life, and whose sons would continue the hopeless task of paying off the debt. Daughters, as one of the main causes of expense, and as moreover in the higher castes not easily to be married within the permitted limits, had tended to be a little scarce in some parts of the country, and though before the days of which I myself have memory, female infanticide had become dangerous, I can recall at least one village in the North in which the proportion of surviving female children was maintained only under constant and very unambiguous hints

from the District Officer. But my friends, if in some aspects ruffianly, were good men and true, and in after years when I was tied by the leg in the editor's office in a great Indian city, and much exposed to Indian politicians, the memory of them was a tonic. As I have already boasted, never in my Indian journalistic days did I use the cliché about the rupees and the virgins in Bengal ; but under such irritants as prickly heat and Indian politicians provided, I confess I was sometimes glad to think that those risks to purse and person, if fortunately remote and easily insurable with the British *Raj*, still existed.



XII



## XII

OF necessity, he is a composite creature, the young and in some ways pathetic seditionist of whom I am about to talk. The particular case would fall into the province of the novelist : I am trying to convey an idea of how, twenty or more years ago, young Indians, often worthy of much better careers, drifted into sedition, and I must amalgamate several cases known to me if I am to do that.

I would not place him particularly ; I knew him in the North and in the South, and there was a period when, apart from mere journalistic information, I had some little knowledge of him in the Bengal that seemed the most appropriate hot-house for that strange and pitiable growth.

Therefore I will not give him any localising Indian name ; I will call him X, and, indeed, to the end he remained an imperfectly known being. In my own experience of him, he seemed quite often to have set out with a craving for attention, or even for affection, from some white man who represented to him what was presently to be denounced as the detested British *Raj*. And even after X had taken the plunge, and become one of some actual or ideal body of liberators, he was capable of strange revulsions. There was a time when there occurred rather frequently, among my batch of letters from hysterical Indian youths, letters from one at a certain developing centre of sedition. I am afraid I did not do my share in saving this brand from the burning ; but with a daily paper to edit, and the thermometer behaving in a manner that would cause Mr. Negretti to commiserate with Mr. Zambra, I did not feel like writing five-thousand-word letters in order to justify the presence of Great Britain in India. Presently I learnt

that the youth had been involving himself in some more than ordinarily foolish political activities. A little later I received a letter from him telling me that he had been profoundly deceived in me, but had at last discovered that I was "a wolf battenning on the bowels of India." A little later I was taking a long journey, in the course of which I went through the station of his town, and the train stopping there long after midnight I was roused by a young Indian who wanted to garland me, and who proved to be no other than the young gentleman who had given so unflattering a zoological description of me. When I asked him why he had experienced this impulse to meet a train at a most inconvenient hour to decorate a person whom he had lately condemned, he told me that it was because I had since written an article, in no way inconsistent with the rest of my stuff, in which I had spoken with pity of some of the young lives perverted by the cruder forms of Nationalism when the higher might be made available. And



I daresay that was very often the trouble with X. Through our system of education, he had been introduced to those of our writers who have most loudly hymned liberty ; and as there was in India neither a Ministry of Petting nor a Ministry of Smacking, he had had neither delicately sympathetic encouragement nor sharp discouragement. I know of one young man, at heart a good fellow and not without ability, whose evident trouble was inability to find occasions for applying the magnificent sentiments he had acquired from English literature. Here were the resounding ready-made denunciations of the tyrant : obviously a tyrant must be discovered or some of the happiest results of education will be wasted. That Mr. X, who confided to me his extreme regret that lack of scope for denunciation of tyrants would prevent him from writing for my paper, sought his opportunities, as so many of his kind did, in the Indian-owned Press. In the part of the world we were in, he had not much chance. The leading

Indian-owned paper had an Indian leader-writer who, for force and brilliance, could not have been easily matched anywhere. Over another paper there depended presently the mystical mantle of one who had served many causes and was not likely to be thrilled by youthful enthusiasms for any. But there were always small opportunities, and in Bengal there were specialised organs for the denunciation of the British *Raj*.







### XIII

It was from Bengal that there came in those critical days, when so much of what British and Indians have since deplored could have been averted, the cleverest guidance. Under one Bengali leader's suggestion enormous emphasis was put on the paucity of the British in India. "You are so few," one of my young, semi-seditious friends once said to me. "Yes," I replied, "we have given you the minimum of tyrants and exploiters to be cross about." Anon, there was a then eminent Bengali agitator who urged Indians to violent action by saying that should they all spit together the British in India would be drowned. Thereupon I wrote a little thing to the effect that organised expectation was probably not the form in which



AN EMINENT BENGALI AGITATOR WHO  
URGED INDIANS TO VIOLENT ACTION

India would find its highest corporate activity

But, make no mistake, among so much that was silly and a certain amount that was dangerous, there were streaks of something that could have been made fine. A proportion of the young men who finished by flinging invective about might be colloquially summed up as patriots who could find nothing about which to pat. They were driven, in the muddlement of their minds, but sometimes by generous instincts, to the monstrosity of objecting to the presence of an alien in India. It would be interesting to know at what date there was no alien power in the country. The Hindus of the original stock were themselves invaders, wave after wave of Mahomedan invasion swept over the northern part of the country till the Moguls, destined to produce in Akbar at once the greatest and the most tolerant of the indigenous rulers, established themselves, and the British rule of India, regarded in perspective, is not remarkable,



except for the eventual efficiency and integrity of the administration.

The really dangerous matter came from no excited Bengali orator or journalist, but from the cold, subtle, and implacable mind of a Chitpavan Brahmin in the Mahratta country. My little Mr. Xs being lured or driven into muddled sedition were creatures whom one was sometimes bound to pity, and who certainly excited no alarm : Bal Gangadhar Tillak was much the most dangerous opponent British rule in India has known since the Mutiny of 1857. Working in the Mahratta country he had carefully developed a cult of Shivaji, the greatest of the Mahratta leaders in the period before the British conquest. By almost incredible strategy, he had then extended the cult of this fiercely sectional hero of a portion of Western India, so as to enrol among its adherents numbers of the descendants of those Bengalis to whom Shivaji had been a terror. Call to mind that Calcutta had a Mahratta Ditch, relic of a very necessary protection against

those marauders from Western India. Call to mind also that decades after Shivaji was dead the peasant women of Bengal scared their children into good conduct with his name. Then estimate for yourself the ability of the man who had persuaded Bengalis (and members of other communities repeatedly trampled over by the Mahrattas) to take part in the worship, for it was little less than that, of the greatest of the Mahratta military leaders.

And then Tillak had another, though here only a local, hold on the regard of his people. He was a lawyer, and he knew how to make them feel that he was their standing counsel without thought of recompense. Moreover, he was a journalist, and, except for two or three lapses, showed remarkable skill in stopping just short of what would bring the activities of his papers to an end. One of his lapses was a rhapsody over the throwing of the very first of the bombs, twenty-five years ago when two British ladies, driving home in a closed carriage from the Club, were

killed by an infernal machine meant for a legal authority who had been concerned in the prosecution of some seditious. It charmed Tillak that, whereas the crude weapons for waging war against the King-Emperor were bound to be detected when anybody sought to amass them in useful quantities, those "simple, playful sports of science," the bombs, could be made quite easily and privately, and could produce an effect admirably disproportionate. When I read that hellish article of Tillak's, and when I called to mind that he already well knew the danger of journalistic incitement to outrage, for, ten years earlier, he had been deported from India as morally responsible for the murder of a British official who was doing no more than protect the people from the ravages of plague, I said to myself that some day and somehow I would injure that man's power.

There came the time when, issuing from incarceration, he brought, or more cunningly went to the first stages of, a libel

case against the late Sir Valentine Chirol, who, in his articles in *The Times* and in his reprinted volume on Indian unrest had faithfully described the political character of Tillak, not hesitating to ascribe to him the degree of responsibility which the man who merely inspires assassination may have for it. It was known to me that Tillak meant ages to pass before his action, instituted in London, would be begun by him. Meanwhile – and see again here the strategy of the man – as Sir Valentine Chirol's account covered his whole past every critic of Tillak's resumed activities would be absolutely precluded from throwing up against him things dreadfully pertinent because, an action having been instituted they were *sub judice*. To me this was utterly intolerable. I thought hard, knowing that I had to do with one who possessed the wisdom of the snake, and then I committed in print one of those slight indiscretions which have been laboured over and judged and re-judged and refined to the point where they would

hardly be perceived and then put back into a grossness that might earn one the heaviest penalties. For two days I went about between hopes and despairs. Then, filling my weary soul with glee, there came a terrific and to me, delightful communication from Mr. Tillak, naturally his own lawyer, telling me that I was prejudicing the case of Tillak *v.* Chirol. I sat down and wrote to him that, though I was aware of the institution of the case, I was not aware of the particular points on which he complained of Chirol, and could I be furnished with a full statement of his complaint, I would see that I did not touch the matters of which he had complained. To my utter amazement, though it was the end to which I had worked, that infinitely cunning man fell headlong into the trap.

He had returned to politics, and should I attempt to diminish his prestige by recalling certain lurid episodes, I too would be defendant in the libel case. But he sent me a duplicate of the complaints that he had against Chirol, and in explaining

how little of that matter had appeared in my calculated indiscretion and how careful I should be in future to avoid reference to the other points on which he felt himself aggrieved, I was able to publish, verbatim, what Chisolm himself could not at that time have published

But I should be conveying a very wrong idea of the political atmosphere if I implied that exposure did anyone much harm. For a nice example, there was the European woman of sub-genius who ran the coming Christ until there were difficulties in the Law Courts and elsewhere, and ran Home Rule for India until there were difficulties of another kind. I do not know that it ever mattered seriously to her to have been assailed, to have had something out of the past flung in her face, she was flexible enough to deal with criticism of one activity by developing intense activity in another department. There were, indeed, a few Indian agitators (I use the word in no offensive sense) who had a reputation for consistency. Thus there

was, in Bengal, Surendranath Bannerjee, who had maintained, as "the silver-tongued orator," a wonderful consistency – of sound, perhaps, rather than of opinion.









## XIV

THE confusion of political thought in the India of those days was extraordinary. The leaders in an older generation had been quite intelligible, being, in fact, equivalent to certain of the Radicals and advanced Liberals of our own mid-Victorian political life. They had desired Home Rule, but in most instances not very urgently, and in any event a kind of self-government so closely modelled on British institutions that the demand for it could not possibly be popularised among Indians. The main concern of some of the most eminent and justly respected of them had been social reform; and morally this concentration on modest instalments of social reform had been perfectly right, but

it was obviously not the wisest strategy for politicians. The time had come when the political wing pointed out to these reformers that, in order to make a case for reform, they were exposing social evils in a lurid light, and enabling anybody who was hostile to India's political progress to retort, "How can a country like that be fit for self-government?" Partly in consequence of such persuasion, partly because that particular type of Indian public man (Gokhale, for instance, whom I knew well and liked through every difference on public affairs to the very last) suddenly ceased to be produced, there was an immense shifting of emphasis on to politics. But this new political activity was far from deriving no aid from the intellectuals. As the result of the efforts of two white women, Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant, and of Colonel Olcott (his colonelcy was highly American), there had been spread over intellectual India a theosophic mist in which the past of India, during some period which no

historian has been able to discover, gleamed more than golden. It was now, with many a point of honour to claim for the oldest, the strangest, the apparently least defensible of Indian institutions a perfection, thousands of years ago, towards which the wisest of the West could hardly be said in the twentieth century to be groping.

To take an extreme case, I had an intelligent and far from base-minded Indian contend with me that the system of *deradasis*, children brought up to be Temple prostitutes, was not the degradation of womanhood, but the wise bringing under religious influence of a trade that would otherwise flourish in utter ungodliness. It was suggested to him that possibly a child of six was not of an age to decide whether serving God in that particular way was the life most appropriate for itself, but he was of those who had decided that not the smallest blemish must be admitted in the ancient civilisation of India or even in the accretions



THE WISE BRINGING UNDER RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE  
OF A TRADE THAT WOULD OTHERWISE FLOURISH  
IN UTTER UNGODLINESS

which can be dated to fairly modern times. There was another Indian not less intelligent or worthy, who insisted to me on many occasions that the problems of this new science of eugenics that was beginning to be talked about had been completely solved in the caste system. That is to say, a system which first assumes the utter unworthiness of each of the untouchable communities and then renders it impossible for any better blood to be introduced by marriage with a higher caste is helping that community to breed better. And there were some amiable enough but slightly fatiguing cranks whose concern in life seemed to be to establish, with decidedly illogical pride, that some despicable invention of a materialistic, Western civilisation had been anticipated by India in a religious work of great antiquity. I speak of the oddities thrown up by this movement, but the thing was serious enough in its effect on many of the younger minds. There was little enough of the critical faculty in India before all

this developed ; by the time it had come to a head, there was none.

Not only in the past did those unhappy young men, the Mr. Xs of my narrative, discover mighty heroes, sometimes aided in doing so by the very curious incapacity of the subtle and active Hindu mind for history – broadly speaking the only indigenous histories of India are the work of the Mahommedans. The very natural search for contemporaneous heroes was begun. As it was the British Government, through its learned departments, which revealed to a long unheeding Indian public certain aspects of the indubitable grandeur of ancient India, and as it was an English teacher of art at Calcutta who set the excellent new school of Indian artists working on the genuine old Indian models, so it remained for the late Sir Edmund Gosse to dissuade the young woman poet, now known as Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, from writing with English accessories and choosing Indian local colour, and so it remained for Mr. Yeats to acquaint the

greater part of India with the fact that a most picturesque and amiable Bengali gentleman, even then past middle age had for long been the national poet of India. The dutiful patriots in other provinces who hurried to his works read him perforce as Mr Yeats had read him, in an English translation, and convinced themselves that they had known all about him all along. I can only say that with some natural curiosity about poetry, even in languages which I cannot read, I had never heard the name of Rabindranath Tagore outside Bengal until the boom was begun from this side. But I would not seem to speak slightly of a man of great personal dignity, and no doubt of considerable poetical susceptibility. The reflection is not on him but on the persons who incontinently adopted him. And so things went on through a period that managed to be both dreary and disturbed with no sort of constructive political thought emerging anywhere. A little later on, India did put forth some real political thinking, but at



no moment could one say that one would not be crashed through what seemed fairly solid ground into fantasy or the prejudices of a particular community. As a random sample, I give the naturally unpublished story of the three learned Mahommedan doctors of theology who insisted, despite some tactful dissuasions, on delivering to Mr. Montagu, the Secretary of State, then on tour in India to prepare a scheme of reforms, their short and simple judgement on the whole matter.

It was enough for these saintly sages that the best authorities were against Mahommedans acquiescing in any system of government emanating from Jews, and that Mr. Montagu was a Jew. Should he persist with his scheme and the result involve a subjection to anything emanating from himself, it would be their duty to proclaim a Holy War. That, of course, went far beyond the usual lapse ; but for years there was hardly a day in which, in the midst of what purported to be practical politics, there would not be inflicted on us

something so crude as to shake one's faith in the ability of certain types of Indians to entertain a political idea at all, except as a man may have in his house things of which he knows not the quality, but which are there to create a good impression.







## XV

It may hardly be credited, but during the ten politically very critical years from 1907 I never read or heard any Indian suggestion for coping in a scheme of Home Rule with the obvious and gigantic difficulties of defence. Again and again I asked Indians of ability whether they seriously supposed that Great Britain, departing from the policy followed in regard to every dominion on the concession of Home Rule, would hire out British troops to be used on occasion in the suppression of disorders resulting from the enforcement of policies not British in their origin. The majority of those whom I questioned put the question by, a few got a little uncomfortable, but not one ever attempted to deal with

the question obviously to be solved before there could be even the dimmest beginnings of Home Rule as regards other than purely local affairs. And it is a matter of sober historical fact, very well worth keeping in mind, that the only solution of the problem of defence yet put forward is due, not to any Indian politician or party, but to the Simon Commission. I tried to have a word with Mr. Montagu on that point in one of the less formal conversations I had with him, but he developed a marked desire to talk about something else, and it was not for me to disturb, under convivial conditions, a peace that had with such difficulty been patched up, with the high contracting party quite reasonably incensed against a journalist who devoted two thousand words every day to thwarting him (the wit of the Indian Civil Service always referred to Mr. Edwin Montagu as "Edwin the Welby-loved"). Earlier there had been between us this little dialogue.

*Mr. Montagu:* "I think you should

realise, Mr Welby, that there are limits to even my infamy ' "

*Welby* ' Well, sir, we all have our limitations ' "

But after that we had had, with Mr Montagu scoring, this more cheerful thing

*Mr Montagu* " I trust, Mr Welby, you will not change your opinions on that point, if I tell you that I share them ' "

We had laughed long and loud over that but laughter in acknowledgement of so shrewd a thrust was not basis enough for private enquiries into matters on which the Secretary of State obviously could not speak in public during the conduct of his enquiry The stuff submitted to him by innumerable delegations can only be called pitiful The era was one in which there was a constant refusal to grapple with any reality and to run away with resonant phrases about good government being no substitute for self-government, and the rot had set in in the most wonderful Services which any Empire has commanded

Mr



The day was nearly gone when the British official asked himself simply what was the necessary or the roughly just thing to be done, and did it without explanation. It was becoming increasingly incumbent on him to persuade and carry with him numbers of Indians who cared not one jot for the urgent needs of a situation, but were anxious to establish some principle or other. I observed with some cynical amusement in those days that the few officials who went far in compliance with the supposed needs of the new conditions, commanded on the whole a great deal less respect than those who frankly held to the old ways. But neither the one class nor the other escaped censure, though it was often mitigated in queer ways. The editor of a well-known Indian paper was giving evidence before a certain commission and was asked to reconcile the bitter things he had said of the typical British district officer with the eulogies of each individual officer that appeared from the pens of the local correspondents when

there was a transfer “ But those ’ he said, ‘ are written by sycophants

The man who made that astonishing remark was one of the very ablest of Indian journalists The confusion of mind it betrays was far more acute in thousands of educated young Indians with no particular prospects and not much idea of what to do with English rhetoric beyond turning it into a weapon against the British Some of them slipped into nothing worse than silliness and waste of time, and the habit of going to political meetings, as our youth goes to the cinema others got tangled up in movements, the logical outcome of which was political crime More than once I had an old-fashioned Indian father say to me that he did not know what to do for the son who had taken up with such companions and political creeds Even the enormous power of the Hindu family system was inadequate when it was a question of dealing with young men introduced to these violent delights of rhetoric

But in many ways we have got beyond that now ; the Round Table Conferences have produced some truly constructive thought, though hardly as yet full confidence in the ability of the proposed structure to stand. And then our own ideas have altered. We now regard it not as a matter of course, but as a notable achievement, that the Empire should, on any day of the week, be solvent and safe.





## XVI

I HAPPEN to be writing just as the Indian Round Table Conference has closed, and though I am perfectly willing to join in the respectful gestures with which that event has been greeted I cannot but wonder what the modified Home Rule that will issue from all these efforts is going to mean to most of the Indian population. You are to remember that ninety per cent. of the Indian population is to be found, not in towns, but in villages, and that the life of much the greater part differs in no essential and not in many incidents from what Indian village life was two thousand years ago.

I call to mind a typical North Indian village. It is early morning and from November to February the early mornings

are sharp in all that part of India ; the bulk of the small male population of the village is warming up round a communal fire in the open, and though the fire seems to produce a great deal more acrid smoke than heat the men are apparently thawing. Their dress is a coarse cotton loin-cloth and, in some instances, a quilted waistcoat or coat. But all are wrapped in bed-quilts. As the first rays of the sun break on this rural world and set the partridges in the fields shouting with satisfaction, men begin to move off to their immemorial tasks. The ploughman is using a yoke of oxen, undersized and emaciated. Even if he thought much of getting better cattle, tradition and usage would discourage him. The cow, with, of course, the calf, the bull, and the bullock, are sacred, and never to be put to death. By consequence, outworn and diseased cattle abound, are used to very nearly the last, and then wander about, a source of degeneration. The sanctity of the cow guarantees only its life ; by no means does

it assure to any Indian cow an adequate diet or veterinary care or a merciful termination of life when that is due With his undersized cattle, then, the ploughman drives through the fields a crude light plough which hardly does more than scratch the land Emissaries of the Government have tried to persuade him of the benefits of another type of plough, of another type of cattle, but the instruments and methods that have always been good enough for the village are good enough for him, and indeed such is the fertility of the soil that he gets quite good results in any year in which the monsoon does not fail

This uncertainty of the monsoon makes Indian agriculture in most parts of the country too much of a gamble for a man to put his utmost energy into it, and then there is the *soukar*, the moneylender, to whom the ploughman, if a typical cultivator, has been heavily and indeed hopelessly indebted for years past What is the good of producing a bumper crop to



fatten him ? There again the Government has had its emissaries at work, and the ploughman and his fellows have been coaxed and amicably bullied until the area, though not this particular little village, has its own simply and scientifically organised credit society. But the co-operative society will lend money only for productive purposes, and the ploughman and his fellows nearly always want loans, fantastic in disproportion to their pitiful incomes, for weddings and festivals. No doubt if India were governed on the remarkable principles which, after a decade of peace, has brought us in England to a condition of nobly suppressed bankruptcy, the Government of India would have set up, in the name of social service, a Department of Weddings and Festivals and poured out money in ways quite as defensible and rather more amusing than those of our own spendthrift politicians. But before you can scatter largesse you must have somebody to tax, and in India relatively to the vast population there is

virtually no one. So our ploughman goes to the *soukar*, pays an incredible rate of interest, and lives and dies in debt, which will be fastened on his son when he has passed away. I ride off the Great Trunk Road and up to the ploughman, having it in mind to ask him whether he has seen any black buck in the neighbourhood. As a source of information he will be no better than anyone else, but in stalking black buck it is often useful to employ a yoke of oxen and a plough, keeping under cover of this familiar object while the ploughman drives in narrowing circles and at last brings one within range. But I am not so foolish as to begin to talk about black buck. I open with a question about the last land settlement. Yes, indeed, he was grievously wronged in it and perhaps I, who am his father and his mother and the protector of the poor, will be pleased to mention the matter at the headquarters of the district. I practise a little evasion, for on the one hand I would not raise false hopes and on the other I should utterly

blast my prestige if it appeared I was not an official. Presently we have got on the subject of black buck, and he tells me there is a herd grazing about two miles away. I hire his cattle and the plough and his own services for a sum that would sound to you ridiculously small, but means much to him. It will be a holiday not only for man but for beast since the plough will simply drag along the earth without being required to cut into it : and on the way I talk to him as simply as I can about the great change that is coming over the country.

It takes a long time to arouse the smallest spark of interest, and then all he wants to know is whether land assessment will be affected. As soon as it is plain to him that there will be no large or immediate changes in the one or two matters that touch him, that tiny spark of interest is totally extinguished. I am sure he is glad when we are near enough to the black buck for me to dismount from my horse and tether it and begin walking on

the hither side of his emaciated cattle. When the stalk is over, and the black buck with an indifferent head has been bagged, there is time to contemplate the scene, which you may deem idyllic. The cultivation stretches unbroken for miles, and with its varying tints of green is a great refreshment to the eye. Even more pleasing to the eye are the women about petty jobs in the fields, for here they still dress in fabric locally dyed and there is a scarlet which would delight any painter, as well as a good blue and other frank colours. The village, though it be no more than an affair of one-roomed mud huts with low, coarsely thatched roofs, fits well into the general scheme. And indeed there is in a measure upon this village what will not be lacking to any place where tradition has long been followed and where no one has thought to dress up one thing as another. But the poverty, though it involves none of the ugliness which poverty produces in the West, is appalling. Nor all these years

has there been any prospect that a man cultivating his fields in a small way could rise to a materially better position. How can you expect these admirably patient and on the whole singularly right-living people to have any ambition for themselves or for their country ?







## XVII

I go into the village to have a word with its recognised head, who is too old to stray abroad. I find an intelligent old fellow taking the sun in front of his hut, and seated on a *charpoy*. We fall at my instance into talk about the political future of India. My host is a travelled man : that is to say, he has been many times to the capital of the province for litigation, the main joy of every rural Indian with a little money, and, in truth, of most others as well. On many a matter of administration he could offer a shrewd enough if narrow opinion ; but the large constitutional scheme is altogether beyond his comprehension and does not even excite his interest. Yet he and our ploughman and millions still



more primitive matter enormously to the scheme, for they are the bulk of the population of India. How they are to be first really interested in the constitutional scheme and then persuaded to play their part in it, I do not know.

Always you are to remember that these are people who for two thousand years have been habituated to allowing new powers to pass over them. They have known anarchy, and they have known fiercely efficient tyrannies, but never one that endured. It has seemed the part of wisdom to them to bow instantly to any *de facto* authority, lest worse befall them, and to wait for the passing of oppression without expecting much relief under what succeeds it. So long as the simple essentials of village life are untouched, the rest can be left to contending authorities far over their heads.

I suppose in time even the Indian peasant will be made what the late Mr. Montagu used to call "politically minded," and I daresay that if India does not

collapse at some later stage of the great experiment there will eventually be an India full of interest to persons who study her then. But assuredly it will not be my India. And I am glad, not out of any political malice, that in rural India the process will be infinitely slow. I do not know what the white man's function then will be, but I know this, that when he is gone into the countryside he will be called in his tent at four o'clock of a cold morning with a *chota hazri* of tea and chupattis. He will plan to steal another half-hour but he will hear the warning voices of the *lhalassis* waiting to strike the tent, which must be on its way by five to the next camp. Before five he will be off himself on a horse made far too lively by the cold. Presently as he rides along the side-track of the great road the first rays of sun will strike the fields and trees, making a world all green and gold, and causing all the bird life of the countryside to display itself as the birds perch themselves, all fluffed out and looking twice their natural

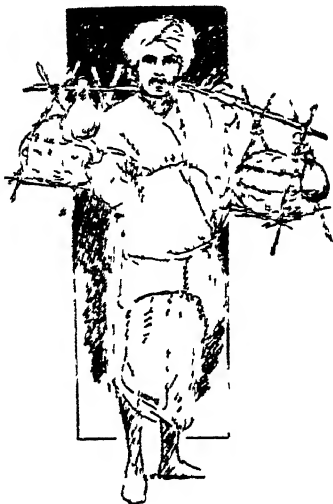
size, on the topmost twigs of trees or on those low mud boundaries which divide the fields in a country that knows nothing of our use of hedges. The little black-and-white Indian squirrels will run half-way down the sunny side of the tree-trunks and greet the horseman with their impudent whistle. Men and women will begin to issue from the rare villages to those labours which no politician can alter and the whole of that life will lie under the horseman's eye apparently unchanged. He himself will have out of mind whatever business takes him forward, and will simply respond to the influences of place and time. There can be no serious shooting while riding from camp to camp, but something is needed for the pot, since we are in a region in which fish, beef, and mutton are equally unknown. A couple of partridges are easily secured, for at that time of day the cock-bird announces his presence with uplifted voice. What else? Well, just one green pigeon to enrich the pot. Not the least sport in shooting this



THE WHOLE OF THAT LIFE WILL LIE  
UNDER THE HORSEMAN'S EYE  
APPARENTLY UNCHANGED

last, and indeed one is rather ashamed to do so. It is an extremely beautiful bird, luxurious in its diet, and lethargic in its habits, the easiest thing in the world to shoot as it sits on one of the sacred fig-trees which it prefers, or wings slowly past.

And so along a road which by day has little traffic, a bullock-cart or so passing every few miles, a pedestrian pilgrim from one of the sacred cities carefully nursing his flask of holy and microbe-charged water which will be given to some invalid when he reaches home, a few men from the villages on errands to larger villages not far off. It is not the time of year to come upon those preposterous processions that take a half-dazed infant bridegroom or bride to the place where the marriage will be celebrated, but they still traverse the great road, for no politician can cure the Indian peasant of his childish and fantastic expenditure on wedding feasts. However, the road is brightened up for us ere long with the spectacle of a yeoman of substance riding on some business with his



A PILGRIM CAREFULLY  
NURSING HIS FLASK OF  
HOLY, MICROBE CHARGED  
WATER

retinue. As he can afford all the right things, his horse is a piebald, which has been carefully taught to caracole. This mode of progress with frequent pauses for circus demonstrations to right and left is merciful to the followers, who are all on foot. When the prancing creature is within a few yards of the English horseman, its rider, being a fine old Indian gentleman, courteously dismounts, and the English horseman does likewise, and for a few minutes there is conversation about the eternal topics of the countryside. And so on, with an encounter or two, till the next camp is reached. The tent, which was unpitched at the old camp last night after one had dined in it and sent forward by bullock-cart, is ready for one, and so is a hearty camp brunch. The horse that went on overnight whinnies at the approach of his stable companion, and the last little bit is done at a fast canter.

After brunch, I suppose whatever work to be done in that India of the future devolves on the surviving white officials.

But I will think rather of the late afternoons and the stroll with a gun, which results in some pretty quail shooting if the sportsman has the luck to come on the large common quail, since the bush quail, the prettiest little things to look at, are runners rather than flyers. And so back to the camp at which the rear-guard, with its tent for the night, has arrived long ago. At this hour the scene is truly patriarchal, the horses are tethered under one set of trees, the oxen under another, the camp followers and carters are preparing themselves an evening meal, and the smoke rises up from their little mud fireplaces densely, bringing into the nostrils that peculiar acrid tang by which more than anything else a man remembers Northern India. The servants have their sleeping-places under trees nearer the master's two tents, and the cook boasts a small kitchen tent, though he actually does his cooking in the open on two small mud fireplaces constructed for the day. On these, and with a minimum of



pots and pans, and with no kitchen table, he cheerfully turns out a three-course meal, the merit of which depends far more on what his master has made available to him than on anything else.





## XVIII

THE quick Indian twilight is going and it is worth while turning away from the camp for a final look at the countryside. Impossible not to be affected by that poetry of the return of man and beast to home and byre which moved the classical poet such centuries ago, and which is common to all countrysides. But here the appeal, reduced to so extreme a simplicity, has the pathos of contentment with so little.

In a great haze of dust the buffaloes are lumbering home. All day the huge brutes have been in charge of a couple of tiny boys, who have whiled away the long hours in snaring lizards, and in setting the very queer insects known as praying mantises to fight. The cows come in under more responsible control and will presently

be mulcted of the pitiful quantity they are capable of yielding. If a cow's calf is dead a calf-skin stuffed with straw, in a manner that would deceive nobody, will be set beside the cow to encourage it to yield milk. The few goats are urgent for home, being intelligent enough to know what creatures begin to prowl a few moments after the sun is down. A jackal raises its horrid voice out of a field, another answers it, and yet another, and a moment later a bedlamite chorus is in full swing. The smoke rises ever more thickly from the village, not, be it understood, from chimneys, for there are no fires in the interiors of the huts, but from certain small fires outside and from one great bonfire by which the wearied workers toast themselves for a little while before their very early retirement. To these people also, with so little to live upon, with such rack-ing anxieties about the things that make or mar a harvest, to them also there comes the hour of repose, of gossip with the burdens of the day dropped and the

body too contented with rest for the mind to question the justice of their lot

And the white man, too, turns to his camp, goes into the dining-room tent, of which he will have the use for only some three hours until it is unpitched and lapses with the aid of whisky and soda into his own kind of peace. The tent is delightfully aromatic, because between earth and carpet there is a thick strewing of straw. It seems to him, whatever he may have thought at other hours and under morbid conditions that things are well enough with the India for which he chiefly cares. There comes into his head the idea that instead of trying to explain all manner of political things to the peasants he might explain their life to the politicians. It is a hard life and yet on any philosophical view has many compensations. Whether the people respond to it or not, nature casts some poetry about the harshness of their tasks. There is simplicity in that life, and the dignity that simplicity brings. It is not a life animated

by any hope : you have only to note the sustained gravity, not untouched with dejection of the expressions of the people. It has its own virtue of stoicism, and it is, and it always will be, the real life of the people of India.



